

POLICY & PRACTICE

Avandia Comes Under Fire

Public Citizen has petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to remove GlaxoSmithKline's rosiglitazone (Avandia) from the market because of unacceptable safety risks. The public interest group cited 14 cases of liver failure—including 12 deaths—in patients on the drug as the main reason for its petition; the cases were reported to the FDA's MedWatch program. "The scientific consensus against Avandia is overwhelming," said Dr. Sidney Wolfe, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group. In response, GlaxoSmithKline issued a statement saying that as recently as July 2008, its external Hepatic Safety Board, which reviews adverse events, "continued to endorse a favorable hepatic safety profile for Avandia. ... The record of safety and effectiveness of Avandia is backed by one of the largest clinical trial programs (including 52,000 patients) ever undertaken for any medicine."

Diabetes Treatment Costs Rising ...

The cost of drugs to treat type 2 diabetes rose from \$6.7 billion to \$12.5 billion from 2001 to 2007, according to a study in the Archives of Internal Medicine. Using data from the National Disease and Therapeutic Index as well as the National Prescription Audit, the researchers also found that the average cost of a diabetes prescription had risen from \$56 in 2001 to \$76 in 2007. The authors, led by Dr. G. Caleb Alexander of the University of Chicago, attributed much of the cost increase to the rising use of newer medications, such as glitazones, exenatide, and newer insulins. "Although many of these newer therapies have made therapy more convenient and may have potentially lowered the risk of treatment-associated complications, further research of their long-term benefits is needed," the authors wrote, adding that "[s]ubstantial outcome differences would be needed to overcome the high cost of the newer drugs."

... As Incidence Nearly Doubles

The rate of new diabetes cases increased by more than 90% over the last 10 years, according to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC found that the incidence of diabetes among adults increased from 4.8 per 1,000 from 1995-1997 to 9.1 per 1,000 from 2005-2007. "This study demonstrates that we must continue to promote effective diabetes prevention efforts," said lead author Karen Kirtland, Ph.D. The incidence of new cases was highest in Puerto Rico, at 12.8 per 1,000, and lowest in Minnesota, at 5 per 1,000.

New Leaders at ATA

The American Thyroid Association installed a new president at its annual meeting in Chicago last month. Dr. Kenneth Burman, chief of the endocrine section at Washington (D.C.) Hospital Center is the association's new president. "It has been a privilege to be a member of the ATA since 1975, my most valued and important society [membership]," Dr. Burman said in

a statement. Chosen as president-elect was Dr. Terry Davies, professor of medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York.

—Joyce Frieden

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Amylin Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Byetta	18-20
Bayer HealthCare LLC	
A1CNow+	5
CONTOUR	24
Daiichi Sankyo, Inc.	
Welchol	12a-12d
Eli Lilly and Company	
Humalog Website	8
Glucagon	21
Merck & Co., Inc.	
Janumet	6a-6b, 7
Novo Nordisk Inc.	
NovoLog	10-12
Levemir	15-16
ResMed	
Corporate	9
sanofi-aventis U.S. LLC	
Lantus	3-4

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